



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Health, Education, and Human Services Committee
receives update regarding Navajo Veterans Housing Project**

WINDOW ROCK – Last Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received an update regarding the Navajo Veterans Housing Project.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), explained that the presentation from the Navajo Nation Department of Veterans Affairs was necessary to inform the public regarding the ongoing construction of homes for Navajo veterans.

In 2013, the Navajo Nation Council approved a two-percent set aside from the Veterans Trust Fund for the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs to construct 15 homes and to provide renovations in each of the five Navajo agencies on an annual basis for a total of four years. Overall, 300 homes are expected to be constructed for Navajo veterans.

Agency staff from the Navajo Nation Department of Veteran Affairs defended claims that the construction of veteran homes is not proceeding in a timely manner.

“For the Shiprock agency, our goal is to build quality homes for veterans. A home that will last a long time. It seems like we may be going slowly but that’s the reason. We are putting these homes together at a pace where all the workers are doing quality work,” stated Wallace Charley, veteran’s service officer for the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs Shiprock Agency office.

There are four phases of construction that include the footing, stem wall, subfloor, roofing, electrical, plumbing and drywall implementation of the new homes. Refrigerators, ovens, the septic tank and leach lines are not included in the house packages.

According to the report, the Fort Defiance Agency has constructed four veteran homes which are in the last stages of Phase II, which includes the installation of exterior and interior walling, roofing, windows and doors.

“In Tohatchi, the veteran is a National Guard. He is getting ready to be deployed back into a hot zone and he is looking forward to spending a night in his new house before he leaves. He is scheduled to be deployed to Turkey sometime in June,” stated Kendall Long, administrative service officer for the Fort Defiance Agency.

A contract with Home Depot allows the business to deliver and supply the agencies with procured bulk housing materials. Home Depot conducts 8-10 weekly deliveries from their Farmington warehouse throughout the Navajo Nation.

“The collaborative efforts and teamwork need to continue with these homes. The projects are starting to move and productivity is happening. As you know at our chapter, these projects are hindering in our area. One of the unique things that has happened is we have Home Depot on board,” stated HEHSC member Council Delegate Kenneth Maryboy (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa).

HEHSC member Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) supported the project’s initiatives by recommending that the agencies work with veterans and other departments.

“I certainly wanted to thank you for the information and I am very happy to see the progress occurring. The recommendation being provided might be also for the veterans participating in the construction work. Proposing the opportunity for their involvement, and working with other departments and agencies to see about their divisional participation,” stated Delegate Witherspoon.

According to the report, budget expenditures of veteran housing projects are increasing and overall, all agencies have spent 43% of their allocated budget.

“When this first initiative started back a year ago, we had over 100 veterans on our waiting list. We brought that down to 46. We are still actively recruiting, letting veterans know that this initiative is available to them for housing,” stated Long.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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